

7th Air Force News

March 3, 1971

377th Air Police Squadron, Law Enforcement

Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, RVN

submitted by [Charles Penley](#)

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SEVENTH AIR FORCE NEWS

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We're called

By Sgt. John Gundersdorf
 (Editor's Note: This is the second part of a continuing series on security policemen as exemplified by Tan Son Nhut's 377th Security Police Squadron)

TAN SON NHUT — They're called everything in the book . . . Pig . . . Saigon Ranger . . . Compound Commando . . . and four letter insults.

What the average person who is often quick to abuse, ignore or insult the blue helmeted air cop doesn't know is that this policeman understands how low other people can stoop. The members of the 377th Security Police Squadron on Tan Son Nhut AB see the results of people who abuse drugs. They know that theft is a major problem on the huge air base. They're aware that Saigon is a city where the unsuspecting are often fleeced, robbed and mugged. They have seen the bloody traffic accidents that maim and kill.

According to 377th SPS officials, narcotics, thefts and traffic accidents are the biggest problems that the policeman face.

Capt. Gary Redecker, a graduate of the Army Ranger School and Green Beret Training, who is now the Law Enforcement Officer at Tan Son Nhut, believes that the local black market helps cause much of the crime.

"It provides a market place for stolen items," he said. "And it adds to the permissive atmosphere over here. The temptation is there because our people have a lot and the Vietnamese don't have as much."

Captain Redecker also explained that inventory shortages are sometimes reported as thefts. He blamed the frequent changeover in personnel and the lost continuity of procedures as the main culprit in this situation.

To cope with the many problems on the huge base, the law enforcement section has a number of diverse responsibilities. Policemen guard com-

pounds and the main gate. Others act as customs agents or ride in roving patrols. There are six active patrols at all times on base, one is a joint patrol with the VNAF. Other security policemen ride with Army Military Police in Saigon or serve in a special Resources Protection Flight known as the Blue Flight.

In many ways the section is similar to a big city police department. There is a desk sergeant and police dispatcher. Also, a small investigations section makes initial reports on alleged crimes. If a felony is committed the investigation is turned over to the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations.

MSgt. John Auer, head man of one of the police flights, said that the cantonment area guards have a thankless job. "They're present to help control entry into the various areas," he explained. "This is to help keep down thefts and provide security."

"On one occasion, a guard noticed something suspicious about one of the maids who worked in the dining hall. He called for the joint patrol and they found the maid had a dozen eggs stuffed into her brassiere. I guess the guard noticed that something was out of proportion," Sergeant Auer said jokingly.

While the guards are posted at the entrance to the cantonment areas, strolling police patrols roam the base.

Sgt. Ron Yarnall knows that most of the work, such as apprehending traffic violators or escorting a drunk back to his hooch at night, is routine. Occasionally a fight will break out at one of the clubs and a patrol is called in to separate the participants.

"We try to deal fairly with everyone," Sergeant Yarnall said. "When you come right down to it, we're all in the same boat. We try to give everyone the same treatment that we'd want to get."

SMSgt. Weldon Freeman, NCOIC of

PIGS



the law enforcement section, explained. "My people rarely come back to me asking what happened to a person. It's really none of our business. We're not the judge, we're just a reporting agency."

Sgt. Richard Marchant knows that sometimes being a nice guy isn't easy, but it does pay off. "For three nights in a row I had to break up fights that one particular person started," he recalled. "Finally, after the third time he promised me that he would quit drinking and I wouldn't have to worry about him any more. I haven't heard anything bad about him since."

SSgt. Bruce Bonner, a desk sergeant and dispatcher for 10 years, said that sometimes he's embarrassed to send a patrol to take care of some of the calls he gets. Since he's been at Tan Son Nhut animals have been his biggest headache. He's had to send patrols to chase a water buffalo out of a living area and had men chasing after a pet monkey in a hangar.

The patrol that includes both a VNAF policeman, called QC (Quan Canh), and a USAF policeman is by far the most active patrol.

Each day, Sgt. Clyde Cronin, who has been working the joint patrol for six months, makes sure that he has a large supply of forms to take statements from individuals.

"I'm not concerned with the normal stuff that happens on the base," he explained. "What the QC and I investigate are any incidents involving both Americans and Vietnamese."

walking up to the gate who resembled the description they gave me," Sergeant Marchant said. "He had an ID card and pass, which turned out to be false. I asked him to wait while I check the poster."

The sergeant said the poster matched the man and in the end he surrendered rather meekly.

The men who work the main gate not only make the most arrests, but they also take the most abuse.

Sgt. Frank Lester said, "Lots of dudes will try to tell you they don't need a pass. We get called pig . . . Saigon ranger. All the while we've got to keep our cool."

The policemen at the gate see the law abused too often by a few people. Sgt. Louis Everett related that one day he found 19 ration cards and over \$2,000 on one person. Another guard picked up a man after a package of heroin dropped out of his pocket when he reached for his wallet.

For all the men of the law enforcement section there is some type of daily risk. AIC Ron Simpson, a new arrival to Tan Son Nhut, said that in his first five days on base he had two people take swings at him. But, he added, they were both drunk and didn't know what they were doing.

While there is an everpresent danger in even normal police work, there is also a large amount of responsibility.

SMSgt. Thurmond W. Moore, 377th SPS first sergeant, was an air cop for 16 years before he went into the first sergeant field. Now after four years absence, he's back with a security po-





U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C Jack Cavener
Security policeman search airman at main gate

Sergeant Cronie's favorite partner is Sgt. Visong Linh Van who speaks fluent English and has been working the joint patrol for six years.

"We have an understanding of each other," Sergeant Van said. "So we work very well together." Sergeant Cronie echoed this when he said that he trusted Van 100 per cent.

Since security was tightened around the main gate last summer, incidents, especially those involving narcotics and thefts, have shown a significant decrease while arrests have slightly increased.

Five policemen work the main gate, two checking passes of those leaving and three men watching those entering the base. Out of the thousands of U.S. military personnel who enter and leave the base daily, there are few without proper identification, carrying illegal drugs and even some men Absent Without Official Leave.

One dramatic incident demonstrated the alertness of the men who work this busy post. Several months ago, Sergeant Marchant captured one of the 10 most wanted men in Vietnam who had escaped confinement.

Sergeant Marchant said that the real credit for the capture should go to two off duty air policemen who thought they had recognized a man they had seen on a wanted poster.

"The next morning a man came

lice unit.

"The legal aspects have changed a lot," he said. "Now the air cop must know more about the law and procedures, and about subjects as search and seizure. The air policeman must know these things just like any policeman."

Presently these subjects are covered only briefly during the policeman's training. Once he arrives for duty, he is often given more training on the particular job he will be performing.

Another concern that affects the average air cop is his image. He doesn't like the abuse that he often must turn his back to. Sergeant Yarnall said, "It's a shame that the only time young troops meet the police is when they're in trouble."

He suggested that a community relations program would help improve the air policemen's image. In fact, he would like to see young policemen talk to the troops at unit meetings such as Commander's Calls.

Certainly being a policeman isn't an easy job. A good policeman has to give up part of his individuality every time he puts on his badge. Perhaps too often the average person forgets that behind the blue helmet and steel shield is a man whose very presence is important for everyone's safety.

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